

Bids sought for new prison facility

Montana Standard, 1/25/12

HELENA (AP) — The Montana Department of Corrections said Tuesday it is seeking bids for a new 120-bed medium security prison to help deal with an increasing number of prisoners, particularly among those needing special care.

The agency said it is looking for a contractor to house the inmates at either a new or existing building. The Legislature last year authorized about \$3 million to develop the facility.

Three private Montana prison operators, including the Butte-based Community Counseling and Corrections Service, and three local governments, including Butte-Silver Bow County, previously expressed interest in providing the beds, including the vacant 464-bed Two Rivers Authority prison in Hardin.

The Department of Corrections said it wants more prison space for inmates needing assisted living help, more specialized resources for very young adult inmates, and more beds for general medium security inmates.

The state says it hopes to award the 30-year contract by late April.

Last fall, Community Counseling and Corrections Service, which runs the Butte Pre-release Center among other facilities, said it could build a new, 120-bed facility for \$12 million to \$15 million, or perhaps add on to some of its other operations in the Anaconda-Deer Lodge Valley.

Mike Thatcher, chief executive officer for CCCS, told the Lee State Bureau at that time that a "Montana-based, not-for-profit corporation with 28 years of correctional experience makes sense" as the contractor for the project.

In a 74-page bid request, the state said its prison population is expected to increase 2 percent a year, or about 150 inmates during the next three years.

The agency said it has more aging and other inmates with serious, chronic medical conditions difficult to deal with in a traditional prison. The bid request calls for the contractor to provide assisted living facility-type care for at least 20 such inmates.

It has also identified growth in offenders under 25 years old who are "more immature, impulsive and resistant to authority than older inmates and, therefore, have proven themselves more likely to exhibit greater behavioral problems when incarcerated." The bid calls for at least 20 beds and special services targeting the needs of this group, along with up to 80 general population beds.

Butte-Silver Bow said late last year it may have beds available, as did Broadwater and Gallatin counties.

Besides CCCS, the two other private-prison operators who said they may be interested in supplying the room for additional prisoners include Corrections Corp. of America, which already runs the Shelby prison; and the Two Rivers Authority of Hardin.

The Hardin facility has in the past sparred with the Department of Corrections for failing to give it any inmates to house. With no inmate contracts despite years of aggressive marketing of the jail, the \$27 million economic development project has turned into a black eye for rural Hardin.

Jeffrey McDowell, the executive director of the Two Rivers Authority, said the local agency will review the state's latest request and intends to respond.